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LETTER DATED 1 JULY 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a press statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia issued today, 1 July 1998, in connection with Security Council resolution 1177 (1998), adopted on 26 June 1998, on the crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Durl MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Press statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia on 1 July 1998

ON SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION AND ERITREA'S RESPONSE - YES, BUT

It must have been very obvious to all those who have been following the crisis imposed on Ethiopia by the Eritrean authorities through their aggression, that Ethiopia's preferred option for resolving the crisis has been, and remains to be, the peaceful way. This is, despite its prerogative under international law to exercise its legitimate right of self-defence.

Ethiopia's unequivocal acceptance of the U.S-Rwanda proposal is a confirmation of this Ethiopian commitment to peace and its resolve to seeking a peaceful resolution of the military confrontation. Ethiopia's full and unreserved acceptance of the proposal by the facilitators should, in this context, be understood for what it really means. Ethiopia accepted the proposal not because it has no quarrel with everything contained in the proposal - a fact that can easily be overlooked - but because peace demanded that Ethiopia must do whatever is necessary, short of accepting that which would reward the aggressor and humiliate Ethiopia and its people.

On Eritrea's part, its response to the peace initiative was negative from the outset. It refused to cooperate with the facilitators who happened to be mutual friends of the two countries and whose good offices were accepted by both, willingly and with no reservation. Eritrea refused the proposal by the facilitators for one reason only, because it failed to give blessing to Eritrea's illegal occupation through aggression of Ethiopian territory.

Then came the decision of the thirty-fourth Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU which unequivocally endorsed the proposal of the facilitators and appealed to Ethiopia and Eritrea to accept the proposal and implement it. True to form, the Eritrean reaction was negative and the Asmara authorities once again made it clear that peace was not their interest.

It is under these circumstances and following Eritrea's rejection of the appeals of both the facilitators and of the OAU, at the highest level, that the United Nations Security Council was made to be seized with the crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea. There was virtually no stone unturned and no trick left unutilized by Eritrea - including pure and simple fabrication of stories and other diversionary tactics all unprecedented in the annals of diplomatic history - to prevent the Security Council from being seized with the issue, most particularly to prevent the Council from coming out with a just verdict.

But Eritrea failed to succeed and the Security Council did adopt a resolution on 26 June 1998, whose key elements gave endorsement to the OAU decision and, ipso facto, to the proposal by the facilitators.

Ethiopia has accepted this resolution by the Security Council in its entirety, without picking and choosing and with no Ifs and Buts.

On the other hand, Eritrea's response has been no more than gimmick. The Eritrean authorities have found it necessary this time around to conceal their lack of commitment to peace. They could not afford to be seen to always reject appeals for peace, all the more so because this time the appeal was being made by the Security Council. Accordingly, the Asmara authorities decided to let it be known that they would go along with the resolution of the Security Council, but - and this is the key - on the basis of a selective reading of the Council's decision and of picking bits and pieces from the resolution which is calculated to ignore its key elements.

The international community, and the Security Council in particular, cannot, and we are confident will not, allow the Eritrean authorities to get away with possibilities for prevaricating and for being disingenuous. They should be pinned down on whether or not they are prepared for a peaceful resolution of the crisis which hinges on their acceptance of the proposal which requires them to vacate Ethiopian territory that they have occupied through aggression. This is one of the key elements of the resolution by the Security Council and Eritrea cannot say yes to the decision by the Council, and then in the same breath pretend that it is not required by the same resolution to accept the proposal of the facilitators one of whose key elements is Eritrea's withdrawal from Ethiopian territory. Eritrea should not be allowed to succeed in this attempt at fudging the issues involved which is transparently disingenuous. This again is a reflection of the underlying unwillingness of the Eritrean authorities to accept and implement the proposal of the facilitators which they know perfectly well is the only viable and realistic basis for avoiding that option which Ethiopia has refused resorting to because of its commitment to a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

Now that the Security Council has spoken in clear terms in support of the proposal already on the table, Eritrea should be denied all possibilities for creating confusion and should be required to implement the provisions of this important Security Council resolution without Ifs and Buts. On this depends whether or not the slim chance which might be available for a peaceful resolution of the crisis would be used properly. Here again, as it has always been since the beginning of the crisis, the ball is in Eritrea's court.

In this context, the international community has the responsibility of continuing to put pressure on the Eritrean regime to withdraw its troops from Ethiopian territory on the basis of the proposal made by the facilitators and endorsed by the OAU as well as now supported by the Security Council.